

Our Lady's Catholic High School

Attendance Policy

'At Our Lady's we place Christ at the heart of everything we do. Through our school 'Being One of Ours' virtues, we nurture each individual to love, learn and grow in their unique God-given potential ready to be of service to the world'.

(from OLCHS Mission Statement)

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1 Introduction

This is a successful school, and every child plays their part in making it so. We aim for an environment which enables and encourages all pupils to achieve their potential and aspire to excellence.

High levels of attendance are an important target for the school as only through high attendance can pupils receive their entitlement and achieve their potential. For our children to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they attend school regularly and every child should be at school, on time, every day the school is open unless they have an unavoidable reason to be absent. Poor attendance is a recognised barrier to achievement. Any absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning.

Government research shows a direct link between attendance and attainment and good attenders also make better progress socially, learn to work with others, and are better prepared for the transition to secondary school and, eventually, higher education, training and employment.

It is the role of parents, guardians and the school to encourage 100% attendance for every child. Our school attendance target is 97%, but all pupils should strive to achieve 100% and our attendance policy sets out how together we will support pupils to build positive attendance habits. The policy will be applied fairly and consistently, and we will always consider the individual needs of pupils, and their families particularly where there are specific barriers to attendance.

2 Responsibilities and expectations

2.1 Families

Parents and carers have a legal duty to ensure that their children attend school regularly, if they are of compulsory school age and registered at a school.

Parents and pupils should make themselves aware of the timings of the school day (see Section 4.1), the processes for requesting leave (see Section 3.4), and the process for informing school of the reason for unexpected absence as follows:

If a child is going to be absent, parents / carers must inform school as soon as possible and at the latest by 9.15 am on the first day of absence. Contact should be made calling the school on 01772 326 900 or by emailing the attendance team using the email attendance@olchs.lancs.sch.uk .

Parents and carers must also ensure that school has up-to-date contact information for themselves and emergency contacts.

Pupils' responsibilities depend upon their age, maturity and capability but they too must do their best to attend school regularly and punctually.

2.2 School

Head Teacher

- Leads on ensuring attendance is given a high profile across the school.
- Ensures there are designated staff with day-to-day responsibility for attendance matters and protected time allocated to discharge those responsibilities.
- Takes overall responsibility for ensuring the school confirms to statutory requirements regarding attendance.
- Considers each request for leave against the school's criteria, decide whether some, all, or none of the leave will be authorised and notify parents of this decision.
- Where there is uncertainty regarding an absence, makes the decision whether to authorise an absence, or to request further evidence to support the decision-making process.
- Provides regular reports to the governing body on school attendance, including persistent absence and vulnerable groups.

Staff with designated responsibilities for attendance

- Take overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance in school, liaising with various staff, pupils, parents and external agencies where needed.
- Establish and maintains effective systems for tackling absence and make sure they are followed by all staff
- Have a comprehensive understanding of attendance data.
- Use attendance data to target attendance improvement efforts and support to the pupils or pupil cohorts who need it most.
- Regularly monitor and evaluate progress, including the efficacy of the school's strategies and processes.
- Promote regular attendance through the school newsletter, website and displays and ensure the school's attendance policy is readily accessible.

Other staff with designated responsibilities for attendance

- Complete or update attendance registers as appropriate to their role.
- First day response: contact parents if a reason for absence has not been provided and record this information accordingly.
- Regularly monitor and analyse data to identify pupil, class and whole school attendance concerns and to target attendance improvement support for those who need it most, particularly vulnerable groups.
- Regularly communicates pupil attendance and punctuality levels to parents.
- Discuss attendance concerns at an early stage with pupils and parents.

- Work with pupils and parents to remove barriers to regular and punctual attendance, using attendance contracts where appropriate.
- Involve external agencies to support pupils and parents as appropriate to better understand and address the issues causing attendance concerns.
- Use projects and strategies to improve attendance and punctuality for groups, classes or the whole school (eg incentive and reward schemes, certificates, traffic light letters).

All school staff

- Provide a welcoming atmosphere for pupils and a safe learning environment, particularly for those returning to school following a period of absence.
- Be aware of factors that can contribute to poor attendance and punctuality.
- Recognise that absence could be a symptom of other issues impacting a pupil's welfare and could be a warning sign of safeguarding concerns.
- Adhere to the procedures in place within school to promote good attendance.
- Promote the link between attendance and educational attainment to pupils and parents.
- Complete attendance registers in accordance with the legislation and under the direction of the head teacher.

Governors

- Ensure compliance with The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024.
- Agree an attendance policy and review it annually or more frequently if required.
- Agree targets for attendance at Our Lady's Catholic High School.
- Where the school is not meeting its attendance targets, or when the governors believe there is cause for concern, instigate a review of the school's attendance procedures.
- Authorise the head teacher (or other designated person) to make decisions regarding leave of absence requests.

Schools are bound by a range of attendance legislation, regulations and guidance; please see the appendix for further details.

2.3 Lancashire County Council (the local authority)

School Attendance Support Team

Each school has a named contact in the School Attendance Support Team who can advise schools on attendance related matters, and with whom Targeting Support Meetings will be held

School Attendance Legal Team (SALT)

Following requests from schools for legal interventions when parents fail to ensure their children attend regularly, the School Attendance Legal Team undertakes enforcement processes, including penalty notices, prosecutions, parenting orders, education supervision orders and school attendance orders.

Children Missing Education (CME) Team

The Children Missing Education Team ensures the local authority fulfils its statutory duty to identify children in their area who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school.

3 Types of absence

There are four categories of classification of attendance:

- present: pupil is on the school premises at the time of registration.
- approved educational activity: pupil is engaged in an approved, supervised activity off-site.
 - authorised absent: pupil has the authority of the school to be absent either given in advance (e.g. a hospital appointment) or afterwards (e.g. notification of illness); and
 - unauthorised absent: no explanation received, or unacceptable reason given.

Every half-day absence from school is classified by the school as either authorised or unauthorised and information about the cause of any absence is always required from parents/carers. As a school, we will work with parents (and other agencies, as appropriate) to understand the reasons underlying absence.

3.1 Authorised absences

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school which are considered both genuine and unavoidable by the school. Absence reasons may include illness, medical/dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies or other exceptional circumstances. For appointments which unavoidably fall during school hours, confirmation of the appointment will be requested. Where pupils leave school site before the end of the school day, pupils are required to sign out at reception before leaving.

3.2 Unauthorised absences

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable or justifiable. School may seek advice from the local authority School Attendance Support Team or request legal interventions from the School Attendance Legal Team where there are numerous unauthorised absences. Examples of unauthorised absences are:

- Parents/carers keeping their child off school unnecessarily.
- Absences which are not explained satisfactorily.
- Pupils who arrive at school after the register has closed and without a legitimate reason.
- Days off for shopping, birthdays or looking after other children.
- Day trips and other leave in term time which have not been agreed by the head teacher.
- Days that exceed an amount of leave agreed by the head teacher.

It is only the head teacher who has the authority to decide if an absence is authorised or unauthorised and, if there is any uncertainty relating to an absence, school may request further confirmation from parents before an absence is authorised. For absence due to illness, this may be in the form of:

- Sight of an appointment for your GP or for the hospital, clinic, etc.
- Sight of prescribed medication or prescription for medication.
- Sight of medical notes/records.
- A letter from a medical professional such as a specialist or consultant.

Parents should not ask their doctor (GP) to provide "sick notes" to excuse absence. **3.3**

Persistent Absence (PA)

Persistent absence is when a pupil misses 10% or more of their schooling across the school year for whatever reason, authorised and unauthorised (including illness, exclusion, holiday, etc). Absence at this level will damage any pupil's educational prospects and we expect full support and co-operation from parents and carers to address this.

At our school, we monitor all absence carefully, therefore any pupil whose attendance indicates they are likely to reach the PA threshold will be prioritised and parents will be informed of this. Pupils who are persistent absentees are tracked and monitored carefully.

3.4 Leave during term time

Holidays during school term time are **not allowed**. By law, maintained schools cannot authorise any leave in term time other than in exceptional circumstances.

Leave of absence in term time **will not** be granted unless:

- a request for leave has been made in advance by a parent with whom the pupil normally resides (using the form available on the school website), **and**
- the head teacher considers that leave of absence should be granted due to the **exceptional circumstances** relating to the request.

Due to the need to evidence exceptional circumstances, parents are advised to provide school with any relevant information regarding their request at the point of application if they believe the circumstances are exceptional.

In considering the request school will also consider other factors such as:

- The timing of the requested leave; e.g. during assessment periods, such as GCSEs.
- Any recent unauthorised absence.
- If attendance is already a concern, or could become a concern, because of taking leave.
- Other periods of leave which the pupil may have had, either during the current or previous academic year.

Any period of leave taken without the agreement of the school, or more than that agreed, will be classed as unauthorised and may attract legal sanctions.

In certain circumstances, as outlined in regulation, parents risk losing their child's place on the school roll if leave is taken and the criteria governing removal from roll are met (see appendix).

3.5 Religious absence

School will authorise **one day of absence per religious festival**, e.g. Eid, and this will be marked as code R in the register. The day authorised will be that set aside by the religious body of which the parent is a member. A request must be made in writing/email to the attendance office before the religious festival.

Parents must request any additional leave in advance, and this can only be authorised if the head teacher agrees that exceptional circumstances apply; this would be marked in the register as code C.

3.6 Participation in sporting events

Parents can request leave of absence for their child to take part in regional, national and international sporting events. However, as always, granting leave is at the head teacher's

discretion and she/he will need to discuss with you the length and frequency of the absence(s) requested and how learning will continue if absence occurs.

Leave for a sporting activity that has been approved by the school and is/will be supervised by someone authorised by the school can be marked in the register as code P.

3.7 Participation in performances (e.g. theatre, television, modelling)

Parents of a child performer can request leave from school for their child to take part in a performance. A local authority licence must be obtained before a child can take part in a performance. Before a licence is granted, school will be consulted, and head teachers must be satisfied that the leave will not have a negative effect on the child's education.

Where the licence specifies the dates that the child is to be away from school, the head teacher should authorise those days. However, where the licence does not specify dates, it is at the discretion of the head teacher to authorise the leave request. Any absence authorised for the child to take part in a performance will be recorded as code C1.

Parents wishing to apply for a performance licence should go the Lancashire County Council [Child performance licences webpage](#).

4 Registration

4.1 Attendance registration

Morning registration is between 8.55am and 9.25am.

Afternoon registration is between 12.30pm and 1.00pm.

The school day starts at 8.55am. Pupils are expected to be on the premises at that time and that is when the registration period starts (i.e. when the register is taken and remains open).

When the attendance register has been taken it remains open until 9.25am in the morning and 1.00pm in the afternoon.

School finishes at 3pm.

4.2 Late arrival

Pupils are actively encouraged to arrive at school on time. Emerging patterns of lateness will be monitored and parents informed where necessary. Pupils who arrive after the register has been taken but before it is closed, will be marked as code L.

Pupils who arrive after the register has closed and without a valid reason for being late will be marked as code U, which is classed as an unauthorised absence but indicates that the pupil was physically present in school for part of the session.

5 School attendance procedures

5.1 Attendance concerns

Parents will be contacted by school at an early stage where attendance concerns arise. The school will strive to work with both pupils and parents or carers to resolve any attendance problems together. School will use the following procedures and interventions, as required, to support parents in improving their child's attendance and/or punctuality:

- Telephone calls and/or letters to make parents aware of school's concern about their child's attendance.
- Where there is uncertainty about the reason for absence or extended periods of absence, school may ask parents to provide appropriate evidence and/or undertake home visits to ascertain where a child is and to ensure they are safe.
- Invitation to meetings to discuss concerns with appropriate staff.
- Attendance contracts to identify barriers to regular attendance, ways to overcome these and agree targets for improvement.
- Incentive and reward schemes for individual pupils, if appropriate.
- The Early Help Assessment (EHA) process and/or referral to other agencies and services, including School Nurses and Primary Mental Health Workers, if appropriate.
- For unauthorised absences, request legal interventions by the local authority, such as penalty notices, prosecution or other attendance-related court orders.

At any stage, we may seek advice from the local authority School Attendance Support Team.

5.2 Pupils with medical needs who have difficulty attending school

School will work with parents and other relevant professionals to minimise absence for reasons of ill health. This may be in the form of reasonable adjustments, specific support or resources used within school, or by sourcing appropriate provision at another establishment. When education is to be provided at an alternative location, this should always be done via the use of a direction (please see section 6, below).

5.3 Pupils refusing to attend school

At Our Lady's we believe that every child has a right to a full-time education, and we would not accept "school refusal" as an acceptable reason for non-attendance. In such cases, we

will strive to work with parents to identify the reasons why a child may be reluctant to attend school. We may, with consent, make referrals to external partners as appropriate to try to ensure the correct support is secured for the child and their family. We may also request advice from the School Attendance Support Team.

Where parents decide to educate a child at home, they must provide written notification to school. Where written notification is received the child's name should be removed from the school roll and a copy of the notification sent to LCC for Elective Home Education (EHE). When only verbal notification is the school will endeavour to contact parents / carers and will endeavour to seek further written confirmation. In such cases a pupil's absence will be recorded as unauthorised until written notification has been received and the pupil will be expected to attend school.

5.4 Use of penalty notices and other attendance legal interventions

Legal interventions may be sought if support to improve attendance is not appropriate (eg for an unauthorised holiday in term time) or has not been successful or engaged with. In accordance with the Lancashire code of conduct, we may request that the local authority issue penalty notices for unauthorised absences that include:

- Leave of absence which is taken without a prior request being made.
- Leave taken after a request has been declined.
- Days taken more than an agreed period of leave, without good reason.
- Other unauthorised absence that meets the required threshold, including sessions marked as late after the register has closed (code U).

On 19 August 2024 new penalty notices arrangements came into force, with changes to the cost of a penalty notice and to the thresholds at which penalty notices may be requested by school. The DfE now requires that schools **must** consider if a penalty notice is appropriate when the thresholds are met.

- Penalty notices will be charged at £160 per parent per child. This will be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days.
- Any second penalty notice issued to the same parent for the same child within a rolling 3-year period will be issued at the rate of £160 to be paid within 28 days with no option for a discounted rate.
- The threshold at which a penalty notice must be considered is set at 10 sessions (equivalent to 5 days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10-school week period. This may include absences because of arriving late after the register closes. The 10 school weeks may span different terms or consecutive school years.
- A maximum of two penalty notices may be issued to a parent for the same child within a rolling 3-year period, so at the 3rd (or subsequent) offence(s) another course

of action will need to be considered (such as prosecution or one of the other attendance legal interventions).

- If a school requests a penalty notice for absences other than unauthorised holidays, including being late after the register has closed, the local authority School Attendance Legal Team may issue a Notice to Improve to parents. A Notice to Improve is a final opportunity for parents to engage in support and improve attendance before a penalty notice is issued.

The code of conduct for penalty notices and information and FAQs for parents can be found on the Lancashire County Council [education penalty notice webpage](#).

6 Alternative provision and use of directions

There is a range of circumstances when pupils might be required to access educational provision at a venue other than their main school, examples include but not limited to:

- Pupils who have been permanently excluded or suspended for a period of more than 5 days.
- Pupils unable to access provision at their main school for medical reasons.
- Pupils required to attend another venue for the purpose of improving behaviour, either on a temporary basis or with a view to making a permanent move to the alternative provision (e.g. via a managed transfer).

7 Notifications school must submit to the local authority

7.1 Admissions

All schools must notify the local authority within five days of adding a pupil's name to the admission register and must provide the local authority with all the information held within the admission register about the pupil.

7.2 Leavers

All schools must notify the local authority when a pupil's name is to be deleted from the admission register under any of the grounds prescribed in Regulation 9 of The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, as soon as the ground for removal is met and no later than the time at which the pupil's name is removed from the register. This duty does not apply where the pupil's name is removed after they have completed the school's final year, unless the local authority requests for such information to be provided.

Where a school notifies a local authority that a pupil's name is to be deleted from the admission register, the school must provide the local authority with the required information as laid out in regulation.

In addition to submitting a notification about removal from roll, some circumstances also require school to make referral to other local authority teams such as the Elective Home Education team or the Children Missing Education team. For pupils with an EHCP on roll at a special school, the school must have the agreement of the Lancashire Inclusion Service (SEND) before removing from roll.

7.3 Pupils who fail to attend

All schools (including academies) must inform the local authority of any pupil who fails to attend school regularly or has been absent without the school's permission for a continuous period of 10 days or more.

7.4 Pupils on a part-time timetable

Schools must inform the local authority when a pupil is placed on a part-time timetable. In Lancashire, this should be done via the appropriate form available to schools.

7.5 Children missing education (CME)

Local authorities have a duty to put in place arrangements for identifying (as far as possible) those children of compulsory school age in their area who are not on roll at a school or receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. Local authorities should trace those children and ensure they receive a full-time education.

If a pupil has stopped attending and her or his location is unknown, schools must make reasonable enquiries to establish the whereabouts of the child jointly with the local authority, before deleting the pupil's name from the register. In such cases, school should undertake a home visit, prior to a referral being made to the local authority Children Missing Education team.

Appendix: School attendance and the law

There are many pieces of legislation and government regulations and guidance that are relevant to school attendance and to children and their parents and carers. The list below relates to this attendance policy but is not exhaustive. Some elements of government regulations and DfE guidance do not apply to academies and independent schools (but may apply to independent special schools).

Parents and carers

Duty to ensure children receive education

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 covers the duty of parents to secure the education of children in their care who are of compulsory school age and states:

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable—

- (a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and*
- (b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.*

Offence if a child does not attend regularly

Under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, if a child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly, their parent is guilty of an offence.

The offence is absolute as the only defences available to the parent are those statutory defences listed within that section of the Act, ie:

- the child was absent with leave granted by the school;
- the child was prevented from attending by reason of sickness or any unavoidable cause;
- absence was on a day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which their parent belongs;
- that the school is not within statutory walking distance and that the local education authority has made no suitable transport arrangements or enabled the pupil to become registered at an alternative nearer school.

Compulsory school age

Section 8 of the Education Act 1996 establishes that a child becomes of compulsory school age on the start date of the term following her/his fifth birthday, or that day if her/his fifth birthday falls on the day term starts.

A child ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday in June in the academic year in which he/she reaches the age of 16 or if he/she reaches 16 after the last Friday in June but before the start of the new school year.

Legal definition of "parent" in relation to attendance

The law requires that all “parents” are held responsible for their child’s attendance. This definition can include any person who has care of the child. Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 states:

Meaning of “parent”.

(1) In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires, “parent”, in relation to a child or young person, includes any person—

(a) who is not a parent of his but who has parental responsibility for him, or (b) who has care of him.

Thus, the definition of “parent” means all natural parents, whether they are married or not, and includes any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility and/or care for a child or young person.

Schools

Attendance and absence registration codes

Working together to improve school attendance, DfE statutory guidance 2024, explains which codes schools should use to record attendance and absence in their registers, and specifies the DfE's expectations of schools and local authorities with respect to school attendance.

Data protection

Schools must ensure that personal data is handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Duty for schools to include attendance information in reports for parents

The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005

Duty for schools to notify the local authority when pupils join or leave school

Regulation 13 of The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024

Duty for schools to report attendance concerns about individual pupils to the local authority

Regulation 13 of The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024

Duty for schools to safeguard and promote the welfare of children

Keeping children safe in education, DfE statutory guidance, regularly updated

Duty for schools to share attendance data with the Government

Section 537A of the Education Act 1996 and

Share your daily school attendance, DfE guidance 2024

Leave of absence

Regulation 11 of The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024

Legal interventions

Parents/carers commit an offence if a child who is on a school roll fails to attend regularly and those absences are recorded by the school as unauthorised.

Legal interventions are available under the following acts, guidance and regulations:

- Section 444 of the Education Act 1996
- Section 36 of the Children Act 1989
- Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024
- School attendance parental responsibility measures, DfE guidance 2015

Pupils experiencing social, emotional or mental health issues

Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools, DfE 2023

Pupils with health needs who cannot attend school

Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs, DfE statutory guidance 2023

Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions, DfE statutory guidance 2015

Pupils with individual needs and specific barriers to attendance

When considering the individual needs of pupils and families who have specific barriers to attendance, schools should be mindful of their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Equality Act 2010. The Technical Guidance for Schools in England, published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, outlines the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 for schools.

Regulations regarding participation in performances

The Children (Performances and Activities) (England) Regulations 2014

Regulations regarding removal from roll

Regulation 9 of The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024

Regulations regarding the school day and number of sessions

The Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999

Requirement for mainstream, state-funded schools to deliver a school week of at least 32.5 hours

Length of the school week, DfE guidance 2023

Specialist and alternative provision settings are also encouraged to consider extending their core week where appropriate.